

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE 34

WALL STREET JOURNAL
8 April 1986

In the Wake of Marcos, Filipinos Want To Redefine Relationship With the U.S.

FOREIGN INSIGHT

By LEE LESCAZE

Staff Reporter of THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

In the Philippines, affection for the U.S. once ran so deep that a joke went: "This is the only country in the world that wants to be Mexico."

Only the Philippines, the joke suggested, would seek a place next door to the U.S. giant, where it would bask in, rather than resent, the long American shadow.

A return visit to the Philippines after a 13-year absence indicates that Filipinos are considerably less happy with the U.S. than they once were. Anti-Americanism, which was rarely expressed before Ferdinand Marcos declared martial law in 1972, now pops up in conversations as a matter of course.

Not All Bad

The change in attitude is not all bad. It's healthy that Filipinos increasingly want to identify themselves as Filipinos, rather than as America's Asian relatives. And even if Filipinos have taken a step or two away from the U.S., the country still remains one of America's most sympathetic allies.

Sympathetic, but no longer uncritical. In the post-mortems following Mr. Marcos's downfall, a hot question was the role the U.S. played in ending the Marcos era.

Filipinos who admire the U.S. have found no happy answers. They don't want to believe that Washington turned on Mr. Marcos only when it had no other choice. But neither do they want to believe that it was U.S. backstage maneuvering—rather than the four days of "people power" in the streets of Manila—that brought down the regime.

The Rev. Alfonso Carino, a professor at Notre Dame University in the city of Cotabato, for instance, was discouraged by President Reagan's Feb. 11 statement that the Marcos-Aquino election had been marred by fraud and violence on both sides. For Father Carino, the statement was so obviously wrong that he took it as proof of Washington's continuing endorsement of Mr. Marcos. Father Carino, and thousands of other election observers, reacted to Mr. Reagan's words with the disbelief of a man who hears a radio weatherman saying the sun is shining while listening to the rain drum on his roof.

Unhappiness With U.S.

On the other hand, reports that the U.S. engineered Mr. Marcos's ouster caused widespread unhappiness among Filipinos. Americans were repeatedly asked if it were true that the seemingly spontaneous demonstration of people's power had really been scripted by the Central Intelligence Agency. Had Filipinos been manipulated, they wanted to know, or had they been in command of their own destiny?

The concern with doing it themselves suggests that Washington might help President Corazon Aquino most by staying off the center stage.

Of course, the U.S. wants to help the Philippines recover from the depredations of the U.S.-supported Marcos era—not only because of past friendships and the importance of U.S. bases in the Philippines, but also because Mrs. Aquino's victory, extensively covered by the U.S. news media, won her millions of American friends.

If Mrs. Aquino is to retain her enormous popularity and control the politicians who surround her (remember that Defense Minister Juan Ponce Enrile served Mr. Marcos for 20 years and Vice President Salvador Laurel's personal loyalty ran so deep that four days after the elections he said he would serve as Mr. Marcos's vice president rather than Mrs. Aquino's if that "were the will of the people"), she must be allowed to set her own priorities and to be perceived as her own woman.

Some Filipinos resent politicians like Rep. Stephen Solarz (D., N.Y.), who rushed to Manila and—before Mrs. Aquino had issued any plans—proposed his six-point program for the Philippines. Is there another nation in which a U.S. congressman would presume so much?

Pentagon Profile

While it would ease Mrs. Aquino's way if all Americans demonstrated their support less publicly, it is especially important for the Pentagon to adopt a lower profile. One young government social worker, who recently returned from a visit to several rural villages, says the people are "more anti-U.S. than they're anticommunist." The people's feelings, he explained, were formed by abuse from the Philippine army. The people hate the army and say it does the U.S.'s bidding, he adds.

Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger was greeted by a few hundred hostile demonstrators in Manila yesterday, but the problem goes far beyond a small crowd eager to jeer a high-level American visitor.

Filipinos ask themselves why Mr. Weinberger was the first U.S. cabinet member to visit Mrs. Aquino, and why the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Adm. William Crowe, preceded Mr. Weinberger by a week.

It should concern Washington that the priority given to military visitors suggests, even to pro-American Filipinos, that the U.S. cares more about its bases and about a military solution to the Philippine insurgency than it does about helping Manila deal with economic and social problems.

That allegation has been made in the Philippines for years—by the Communist Party.